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“You’re Manchester United manager, you can’t say things like that”: Impression management and identity performance by professional football managers in the media

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Abstract

This study applies a discourse analytic lens to media interview communication by professional football managers in order to unpack issues related to language use, identity performance and impression management in this professional context. In particular, this study focuses on a case where attention was drawn to the discursive behaviour of a football manager (David Moyes) during his tenure as boss of Manchester United, a global and highly successful club, with some fans claiming his choices were contrary to (i.e. did not appropriately index) the identity of a Manchester United manager (Jackson, 2014; Stone, 2014a, 2014b). Drawing on a comparative fine-grained analysis of post-match media interviews given by David Moyes and two of his predecessors (Sir Alex Ferguson and Michael Phelan), I attempt to identify linguistic features that motivated such an assessment. The findings reveal Moyes’ two predecessors oriented to more assertive language when speaking in post-match media interviews, suggesting that managers of clubs, particularly those with high expectations of success may need to strategically orient to linguistic choices that help them to construct strong and dominant identities. While this study contributes insights into the interactional management of impressions by professional football managers in the media, the broader theoretical contribution of this study is to illustrate the value of a social constructionist perspective on identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a) as a theoretical tool for unpacking issues of impression management, due to its ability to examine complex associations between language use, social meaning and identity construction.

Introduction

This article applies a discourse analytic lens to media interview communication by professional football managers in order to unpack issues related to identity performance and impression management in this profession. Football managers are nowadays expected to conduct aspects of their role in the public eye, often through a range of media interview genres such as the post-match interview. These interviews, as this study will illustrate, can become sites where impressions about a manager’s abilities to manage a football club can be formed, by audiences of football fans and media professionals, from the way they use language.

In this study, I conduct a detailed analysis of a case in which attention was drawn to the linguistic behaviour in media interviews of a football manager of a global and highly successful club, Manchester United. The manager in question is David Moyes who was appointed after the retirement of the club's previous and highly successful manager, Sir Alex Ferguson. Pejorative evaluations were given by fans and fan representatives through media reports (more details provided below in the methodology section) regarding the way Moyes spoke, with some claiming his choices were contrary to what is expected of a Manchester United manager (Jackson, 2014; Stone, 2014a, 2014b). These evaluations suggest that in his media interview performances Moyes did not appropriately enact the expected managerial identity of a manager in charge of Manchester United, which in turn contributed to an unfavourable impression being formed.

The analytical goal of this article is to unpack this case through a fine-grained analysis of the ways this manager spoke in his media interviews to identify what it can offer us in terms of insights into the interactional management of impressions by football managers in the media. In particular, I argue that football managers of clubs with high expectations may need to strategically orient to linguistic choices that help them to construct strong, dominant identities when attempting to manage their impressions in the media. However, more broadly, this study aims to illustrate the value of employing a social constructionist perspective on identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a), as a theoretical construct, to help unpack issues of impression management. This is due to its ability to examine complex associations between language use, social meaning and identity construction, and scrutinise these in relation to valued identity portrayals that can attract favourable impressions in a given context.

Impression Management: Using language to manage impressions in media interactions

Attempting to achieve a positive impression in interaction with others is a pervasive human goal, one that speakers orient to in both personal and professional encounters. Researchers from a range of theoretical backgrounds have attempted to understand the skills and strategies speakers employ or need to employ when attempting to manage their impressions (Berger, 2005; Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; DuBrin, 2011; Landtsheer, Vries, & Vertessen, 2008; Metts & Grohskopf, 2003; Raghuram, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Stapleton & Hargie, 2011; Tedeschi, 1981). For pragmatics researchers, the focus has been on exploring how micro features of language and interaction are implicated in this process (Bilbow, 1997; Fuoli, 2017; Gordon, 2004, 2011; Hobbs, 2003; Lorenzo-Dus, 2005; Simon-Vandenberg, 1996).

On the whole, pragmatics researchers have not extensively explored the topic of impression management in the media. This may be due to perceived shortcomings in a pragmatics research agenda to be able to account for the interpretation processes of a broadcast audience. For researchers interested in questions of impression management in the media, the reactions of a broadcast audience are an important piece of the impression management puzzle. Yet these interpretation processes are hard to obtain and are typically unseen, unheard or unutilised by researchers. These issues with the implementation of audience reaction data may make it harder for those engaging in a pragmatic approach to support claims linking linguistic choices with positive or negative impressions and may have deterred some researchers from exploring topics in this domain. It may also reflect concerns by pragmatics researchers that the concept of impression management promotes a simplistic model of communication, one in which a speaker is seen to deploy linguistic choices that garner them favour with an audience. For pragmatics researchers, and others engaged in the detailed analysis of language use in situ, meaning making is a much more complex process.

Several pragmatics researchers have focused on the way speakers employ language to manage their impressions in media interactions (Gordon, 2011; Simon-Vandenberg, 1996). This body of research has highlighted the idea that impression management is a complex and context-dependent process that involves the deployment of macro level social knowledge by speakers and audiences that contributes to the formation of an impression. For example, Simon-Vandenberg (1996) explored the way politicians answered challenging questions in BBC radio interviews. While other studies have shown politicians to be evasive, vague and non-committal in the face of challenges from interviewers (Clayman, 2001; Clayman & Heritage, 2002), meanings which perhaps contribute to wider discourses on politicians as untrustworthy, Simon-Vandenberg shows how politicians draw on a wide range of lexical and grammatical resources, in particular modal resources, to also express certainty when responding to some questions in an attempt to persuade audiences of the rightness of their claims. This linguistic action can be linked to concerns with constructing an identity or image as a trustworthy, knowledgeable and reliable politician, values positively associated with politicians. While being vague and non-committal are strategic actions for addressing the constraints of challenging questions, doing so all the time is unlikely to create a positive and desirable impression with audiences (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996, p. 390).

Gordon (2011), explored the way linguistic forms were employed by parents on an intervention-based reality television show that aimed to confront them about the bad eating and exercise habits of their children. As with political interviews, this media show, titled *Honey We're Killing the Kids*, threatened the impressions of those parents being interviewed, as it is their children's health, and by extension their parenting that is being called into question. In one part of the show, parents interact with an expert nutritionist whose role is to confront parents about their children's health and present hypothetical future images of their children if their current eating and exercise habits are continued. In addressing the expert nutritionist in these often confronting and face-threatening interactions, parents draw on a range of forms, primarily apologies and excuses, and paralinguistic strategies such as crying and expressing shock, in an attempt to manage their impressions as good, competent parents. They use apologies to accept blame for the potentially troublesome path they have put their child on, but also employ excuses that try to foreground their unawareness as to the damage they were doing. Both of these actions by parents attempt to manage their impressions by accepting blame, committing to changing their ways and trying to minimise the inference that they have intentionally harmed their child.

What can be gleaned from these studies is that a range of linguistic systems can be utilised by speakers when attempting to negotiate their image or impression in the media, and that the linguistic systems oriented to may help speakers construct social meanings positively associated with the social identities, like parent (Gordon, 2011), politician (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996), or others such as television host or social engineer (Lorenzo-Dus, 2005), that they are laying claim to. These studies, therefore, hint that in analysing cases where a speaker has not been successful in managing their impression, clues may lie in the linguistic construction of themselves and the extent to which the choices of a speaker align or conflict with socially held beliefs regarding the identity a speaker is claiming, performing or has been cast in (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a). This claim is further scrutinised in this study with respect to the context of professional sport and the identity of the professional football manager.

Evaluation, identity and impression management in the sports media

The issue of impression management has only been tangentially dealt with in the realm of professional sport, despite a great deal of the activity of professional athletes, coaches and managers being played out in the public eye. Some work has explored the linguistic practices of speakers in the sports media, particularly in post-match media interviews (Caldwell, 2009; Emmison, 1987, 1988, File, 2012, 2015, 2017; Rhys, 2016). Several of these studies have identified evaluating as a key linguistic task required of interviewees in post-match media interviews. This research has offered clues into the impression management concerns of individuals in these interviews by outlining ways sporting professionals deploy evaluative resources with respect to the social meanings they appear to orient to when addressing media audiences.

In an early study of the interactional behaviour of professional athletes and interviewers in post-match interviews, Emmison (1987) found that modesty was a particularly important concern for interviewed athletes. He found that interviewers, in an Australian context, would often formulate questions for winning players in ways that appeared to praise the athlete being interviewed. This put the athlete in the position of needing to address the praise in their second pair part, which they typically did by downplaying or redirecting it in order to appear modest.

Appearing balanced has also been illustrated as a value athletes orient to in their post-match media interviews. In a study of post-match interviews given by Australian Football League athletes, Caldwell (2009) illustrates how athletes appear to neutralise positive evaluations presented by interviewers in post-match interviews. Drawing on Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), Caldwell showed how interviewees would counter positive expressions offered by interviewers in questions with negative linguistic tokens and expressions and vice versa in an attempt to neutralise evaluations of the match. Caldwell suggests that this orientation to a neutral stance is evidence that athletes are constrained by a culture in Australian sports that does not tolerate behaviour by athletes that might be deemed arrogant or conceited (Caldwell, 2009, p. 14).

Concentrating more specifically on identity and impression management, File (2015) found that professional athletes often took action in post-match interviews to orient to values such as modesty and neutrality, but also respect (for opposition and referees) and, in the case of team sports members, a team oriented presentation of self. Ethnographic interview data collected from professional team sports players in this study revealed that these actions were strategically taken to orient to what they perceived to be the values of television audiences. In other words, in order to come across well, athletes sought to construct themselves as modest, neutral and balanced, respectful and team-oriented even in times where presenting self in this way was difficult or emotionally taxing. File (2015) referred to this as a media identity, an identity players strategically enact to help negotiate perceptions of themselves in public.

Football managers managing their impressions in the media

While the above studies present clues relevant to the current study's interests in impression management by sporting professionals in the media, they primarily focus on professional athletes. Rhys (2016) drew on interviews with managers in her study; however, her primary interest was on the nature of the activity at hand (evaluation) and did not make impression management an explicit concern of her study. File (2017) also drew on managerial data as well, focusing on the way managers dealt with questions about the referees. This study did explore impression management concerns and how these were tied up in the linguistic and interactional management of post-match media interviews. However, it narrowly explored ways in which speakers conduct themselves

linguistically in relation to the speech act of criticising and complaining (about referees and refereeing decisions).

Therefore, whether managers in their role are subject to the same beliefs or values as professional athletes when attempting to construct positive presentations of themselves in the media is a largely unanswered question. Their position at the club as manager is an authoritative one (Kelly, 2008), whereby they are the face and voice of the club and are accountable for team performances and results (Bridgewater, 2010, p. 35). Some researchers, not from linguistic fields, have claimed that football managers orient more to the presentation of self in strong and authoritative ways (Carter, 2006, pp. 163–164) perhaps to construct themselves as powerful; however, little linguistic research to date has explored this. These contextual differences between manager and athlete may generate different social knowledge and expectations regarding how managers can and should behave, both in team circles and in the media that audiences may draw on when interpreting and evaluating a manager. In this study, I explore the above proposition by conducting a detailed case study analysis of a professional football manager whose media interview performances attracted negative attention from his own club's fans.

Methodology: a case study approach to analysing impression management by professional football managers in the media

Background to the case in question

The case in question is the high-profile case of David Moyes and his tenure as Manchester United manager. David Moyes took over as Manchester United Football Club manager in August 2013 when his predecessor Sir Alex Ferguson resigned after twenty very successful years in charge of the club. During this time Manchester United had emerged as one of the biggest football clubs in the world, with fans and those running the club becoming so used to success on and off the pitch that they expected it. The manager taking over from Sir Alex Ferguson was always going to have a difficult time emulating this success. Moyes' tenure as manager of Manchester United was highly scrutinised and he was under intense pressure to get results. He lost eleven matches and was sacked after ten months in charge.

Pertinent to the interests of this study was the scrutiny that surrounded the way Moyes communicated in the media as Manchester United manager. Media reports covering the sacking of David Moyes revealed a range of negative reactions of fans and fan representatives to the way he spoke in his media interviews (Jackson, 2014; Markham, 2014; Stone, 2014a, 2014b). One fan representative even claimed the interview strategies of David Moyes were unrepresentative of a Manchester United manager (Stone, 2014a).

"[Moyes] always seemed to capture the wrong mood. At times he would be positive and optimistic at other times it was exactly the opposite. Yet on each occasion it tended to go against the general view of the game. I was at Cardiff when he said a draw was an acceptable result. I could point to another 20 occasions this season when he has said something similar. I just thought 'you are Manchester United manager, you can't say things like that'."

Implied in this and other negative evaluations of Moyes media interview strategies is an apparent failure, in the eyes of football fans, to appropriately signal the identity of a Manchester United manager, one that is presumably associated with different values than those that were signalled in the linguistic choices oriented to by Moyes. This case, therefore, provides a useful contextually bound system through which to understand issues of impression management by football managers in the media.

Using the indexicality principle to unpack issues of impression management

In order to analyse the impression management issue inherent in this case, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) approach to social identity construction, in particular the indexicality principle, was employed as the main theoretical tool. The use of identity as a theoretical construct for exploring issues of impression management has been established in previous research (File, 2015; Gordon, 2004, 2011; Raghuram, 2013; Stapleton & Hargie, 2011). Much of this research has explored the way language has been used by speakers to strategically construct or repair versions of their identities in ways that aim to appeal to audiences.

For Bucholtz and Hall, indexicality is the mechanism by which a person's identity or identities are constituted in linguistic behaviour. It is through the implicatures and presuppositions signalled by the linguistic choices of a speaker in a given role, or the use of linguistic features 'ideologically associated with specific personas and groups' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 594) that a person's identity is constructed or interpreted. Additionally, and of relevance to impression management concerns, according to Bucholtz and Hall, cases where a speaker has not conformed with the social category they are assigned or enacting can be useful site for analysis of expectations regarding particular social identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 588).

In applying this principle to questions of impression management, especially in cases where negative attention or issues of conformity have been reported, analysts can attempt to arrive at conclusions regarding the way a speaker has constructed themselves in a given context and what it is about these constructions that potentially flouts social norms and expectations. In the case study conducted here, connections between the linguistic choices of David Moyes, and what these linguistic choices may have signalled or indexed for football fans about the identity he was constructing, can provide the basis for a discussion of (at least in part) the formation of a negative impression of this football manager in this context.

Analytical focus and methodological design

The use of real-world evaluative data together with linguistic data from media interviews provides an opportunity to 'relate textual and reception analysis' (Richardson, 1998, p. 220), or in this case to examine potential mismatches between the way this manager designed messages and the social beliefs and ideas held by fans surrounding what is appropriate for managers in this context. The research question that drove this inquiry, then, was: how did David Moyes use language in his media interview performances, and what did these choices potentially index for fans with respect to his identity as a Manchester United manager? In addressing these questions, I aim to understand what particular linguistic features were potentially problematic and, with reference to the social meanings they signalled, why these particular linguistic choices might lead to a negative impression being

formed of the manager in this specific context (Manchester United as a successful, global football club).

To address these questions, a comparative analysis methodology was designed that involved the collection, transcription and analysis of post-match interview strategies used by David Moyes and his predecessors, Sir Alex Ferguson and assistant manager Michael Phelan. This methodology allowed the researcher to first identify whether differences did exist, and then, if so, what these differences meant in relation to the way these managers constructed themselves in their role as Manchester United manager. These two predecessors were selected due to their close proximity to the management career of David Moyes and due to the availability of their interviews on public broadcast websites.

Data set and analytical procedures

Twenty-eight televised post-match media interviews carried out after losing matches with the BBC between the 2009-2010 season and the 2013-2014 season formed the data set for this study. The match statistics and raw data surrounding these interviews has been presented in Table 1 below. This number represents all available BBC interviews that were broadcast after losses by Manchester United across these seasons. Three interviews after matches were not able to be located (see matches in italics in Table 1). Losing interviews were chosen as these were in large part the target of negative fan reaction.

This data set was made up of eleven interviews with David Moyes, eight with Sir Alex Ferguson and nine with Michael Phelan. No BBC interviews with Sir Alex Ferguson were available during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 seasons. The reason for this appears to be Sir Alex Ferguson's refusal to speak to the BBC during this time over a dispute regarding a BBC Three documentary in 2004 that covered Sir Alex and his son, Jason Ferguson. Sir Alex felt the documentary unfairly depicted his son (see Taylor, 2011 for further details) and refused to appear on any BBC productions for a period of seven years.

David Moyes

Season: 2013-2014

Date	Round Out of 38	Opponent	Home/away	Result (margin)	Interview duration
01/09/13	3	Liverpool	Away	1-0	1min 19sec
22/09/13	5	Manchester City	Away	4-1	1min 36sec
28/09/13	6	West Bromwich Albion	Home	1-2	1min 40sec
04/12/13	14	Everton	Home	0-1	1min 13sec
07/12/13	15	Newcastle United	Home	0-1	1min 29sec
01/01/14	20	Tottenham Hotspur	Home	1-2	1min 27sec
19/01/14	22	Chelsea	Away	3-1	2min 10sec
01/02/14	24	Stoke	Away	2-1	1min 58sec
16/03/14	29	Liverpool	Home	0-3	2min 9sec
25/03/14	31	Manchester City	Home	0-3	2min 7sec
20/04/14	34	Everton	Away	2-0	1min 48sec

Season result:

7th

Sir Alex Ferguson

Season: 2012-2013

Date	Round Out of 38	Opponent	Home/away	Result (margin)	Interview duration
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20/08/12	1	Everton	Away	1-0	----
29/09/12	6	Tottenham Hotspur	Home	2-3	----
17/11/12	12	Norwich	Away	1-0	1min 20sec
08/04/13	31	Manchester City	Home	1-2	1min 40sec
05/05/13	36	Chelsea	Home	0-1	1min 43sec
Season result:					1st
Season: 2011-2012					
23/10/11	9	Manchester City	Home	1-6	1min 56sec
31/12/11	19	Blackburn Rovers	Home	2-3	1min 49sec
04/01/12	20	Newcastle United	Away	3-0	1min 15sec
11/04/12	33	Wigan Athletic	Away	1-0	2min 1sec
30/04/12	36	Manchester City	Away	1-0	1min 28sec
Season result:					2nd
Michael Phelan					
Season: 2010-2011					
Date	Round Out of 38	Opponent	Home/away	Result (margin)	Interview duration
05/02/11	25	Wolverhampton Wanderers	Away	2-1	2min 12sec
01/03/11	28	Chelsea	Away	2-1	2min 19sec
01/05/11	35	Arsenal	Away	1-0	1min 58sec
Season result:					1st
Season: 2009-2010					
19/08/09	2	Burnley	Away	1-0	1min 52sec
25/10/09	10	Liverpool	Away	2-0	2min 55sec
08/11/09	12	Chelsea	Away	1-0	----
12/12/09	16	Aston Villa	Home	0-1	2min 31sec
19/12/09	18	Fulham	Away	3-0	2min 7sec
20/02/10	27	Everton	Away	3-1	1min 50sec
03/04/10	33	Chelsea	Home	1-2	3min 37sec
Season result:					2nd

Table 1: Data set: BBC post-match media interviews after losses with David Moyes, Sir Alex Ferguson and Michael Phelan

All media interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed for similarities and differences. In order to support interpretations at an indexicality level, a bottom up analysis, typical of the kind carried out by pragmatics researchers, was applied to the managers' behaviour in their media interviews. Specifically, this involved fine-grained analysis at a range of levels – lexicogrammatical, discourse, content and interactional – in order to explore similarities and differences in the way these managers approached the task of evaluating matches in their interviews. While there is some overlap in these different levels of language, the following definitions were applied here. The discourse level involved the analysis of speech acts deployed by the three managers. The lexicogrammatical level involved a concentration on lexical choices and the use of particular grammatical clause structures by managers more generally, but also involved a focus on the ways the managers used particular lexicogrammatical features to realise speech acts. The content level focused on topics discussed and topical themes evident in the responses given by managers, and the interactional level focused on patterns evident in the way managers managed the back and forth of interaction with the interviewer and in their role as interviewee.

Analysis involved cycling through the transcripts and exploring the way the three interviewees performed the various evaluation tasks of the post-match media interview genre. As outlined above, evaluating is a key task speakers engage in in post-match interview discourse, and this provides a useful point of comparison for exploring the way the three speakers engaged in their role as Manchester United representative (see for example Caldwell, 2009; File, 2012, 2015, 2017; File & Wilson, 2016; Rhys, 2016). The speech act of evaluating is also a useful way for exploring how speakers position themselves in relation to events and other people (DuBois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009). The analytical depth proposed here is a strength of case study designs made possible by smaller data sets and greater analytical engagement with these data sets.

The findings from this fine-grained discourse analysis were used to identify, at a more abstract level, what social meanings the speaker's choices appeared to signal or index. It is at this level that claims can be made regarding the way the three managers constructed their identities as Manchester United manager and what these constructions potentially meant for the management of their impressions within the specific professional context being examined here. Again, the close analysis of a small data set was valuable here as stances and identities can also be indexed in a range of linguistic (and non-linguistic) phenomena, and approaching the task of analysis therefore needs to account for different levels of the linguistic system (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 586).

Findings

From the analysis, differences between Moyes and his predecessors emerged in a range of key evaluating tasks, namely the use of complimenting speech acts paid to opposition teams, the strength of negative evaluation of the manager's own team's performances, the degree to which the managers invoked the expectation surrounding the club, and differences in modal verb phrase constructions with respect to evaluating the team's future response to the loss. These differences will now be illustrated below. The implications of this collection of differences for the construction of a managerial identity and the management of impressions in this particular context will be explored in the discussion.

(1) Positive evaluation of opposition teams

One difference observed was with the use of compliments or praise of opposition teams. While all three managers gave credit to the opposition in their losing interviews, there were differences regarding *when* or *to whom* these compliments were offered. In the data analysed here, Moyes used this strategy when reflecting on losses to fierce rivals of the team and those teams expected to be competing with Manchester United for the title. Extract 1 is an example of this.

Extract 1

0:00.0 - 0:08.8

Interviewer

1. well David first of all can I just ask you your general thoughts after that

David Moyes

2. we didn't play well enough to win the game
3. Manchester City played well and they deserved their victory

In this example, after a 4-1 loss to Manchester City, a fierce rival of Manchester United, David Moyes compliments the opposition's performance and states that they deserved their victory.

Complimenting fierce rivals after losses was not seen in the interviews of Moyes' predecessors. For Ferguson and Phelan, strong positive assessments of the opposition were reserved for teams well below them in the Premiership table and with whom fierce rivalries did not exist. Ferguson offered quite extensive praise in the post-match interview data analysed here, after losses to Wigan, Newcastle and Norwich, but not in losses to Manchester City or Chelsea (both rivals for the Premiership title). Even in a 1-6 home loss at the hands of Manchester City (a larger loss than the one David Moyes was speaking after in Extract 1 above), Sir Alex Ferguson did not make reference to Manchester City in his BBC interview, even when given an opportunity to by the interviewer, as Extract 2 illustrates.

Extract 2

1:28.3 - 1:40.1

Interviewer

1. what's the most upsetting part of today is it the defeat the manner of it or who it was to

Sir Alex Ferguson

2. it's a defeat and it's a bad defeat
3. and that doesn't matter which what you describe
4. a terrible defeat for us

In this example, Sir Alex Ferguson actively ignores the agenda of question directed at him regarding the upsetting nature of the loss. Embedded in this question is the presupposition that losing to fierce rivals Manchester City is particularly upsetting. However, Ferguson does not draw attention to this, and instead chooses to focus on the nature of the defeat. Additionally, he addresses the question briefly (in comparison to the length of other answers he gives), an action that potentially signals an unwillingness to discuss the topic of a rival's victory. Phelan also avoided or sought to mitigate complimenting speech acts in losing interviews when the opposition team as a close competitor for the Premier League title. In Extract 3 below, Phelan uses strategies that help him to reduce the strength of any acts interpreted as complimentary of Liverpool, another fierce rival of Manchester United.

Extract 3

Michael Phelan

1. well you pay attention to the previous form of course you do
2. but you know Liverpool handled it a little bit better than we did today
3. it will kick them on no doubt
4. I think the atmosphere and the crowd here today probably enabled the players to show a lot of endeavour
5. and I think they responded to that pretty well

While there are positive assessments of the opposition in the above extract, they are differently constructed to the ones offered by Moyes in Extract 1 above. Of note is the use of 'a little bit' in line

2 when discussing Liverpool's performance in the match and the use of 'pretty' in line 5 to assess the performance of the opposition at their home ground. These actions appear to show a concern by the manager with reducing the strength of his positive evaluations of the opposition teams.

This feature of Moyes' post-match interview talk appears to have been one that generated particular attention from fans of Manchester United. In several of the press reports covering the sacking of David Moyes (Jackson, 2014; Markham, 2014; Stone, 2014a, 2014b), fan representatives raised specific concerns about the complimentary way Moyes spoke about opposition teams more generally, particularly when suggesting that fierce rivals Manchester City were a team to aspire to (Markham, 2014) and that his team were underdogs in a match against Liverpool (Jackson, 2014), both of which were negatively evaluated by fans.

(2) Negative assessments of the manager's own team

There was also some evidence in the data that Moyes' predecessors, particularly Ferguson, used stronger negative adjectives when evaluating a loss, and that some of these negative assessments were directed at his player's actions. In Ferguson's interviews, particularly when summing up a bad or significant loss, a range of adjectives were employed, some of which could be considered quite strong, including 'bad', 'terrible', 'horrible', 'suicidal', 'annoyed', 'embarrassed' and 'disappointing'. Extract 4 provides an example that includes several of these choices.

Extract 4

0:00.0 - 0:24.4

Interviewer

1. well Sir Alex these days happen these scores happen they don't usually happen to Manchester United

Sir Alex Ferguson

2. no no that's true
3. but they did
4. it was a horrible defeat
5. but really mainly suicidal it was
6. at ten men we kept attacking with fullbacks running up as wingers almost
7. but left ourselves at the back two v three times
8. it was crazy football
9. and ends up an embarrassment

In this example, several of these strong negative adjectives can be read as critical assessments of actions of his players, for example, describing the attacking behaviour of his players as 'suicidal' (line 5) or 'crazy' (line 8) and evaluating the defeat as horrible (line 4) and embarrassing (line 9). Phelan was less severe than Ferguson but did at times draw on strategies that drew critical attention to the players, as can be seen in Extract 5 below.

Extract 5

0:00.0 - 0:20.2

Interviewer

1. well mike what's your assessment overall today

Michael Phelan

2. extremely disappointed
3. I thought first half the lads were a little bit sluggish didn't get into gear quickly
4. second half we put on a little bit of pressure
5. I thought once they scored funnily enough it gave us a bit of a shock and I think that's when we started to play our best football

In line 2, after being asked to provide an overall assessment of the match, Phelan expresses his disappointment but strengthens this with the modifier 'extremely'. The use of 'disappointed' over 'disappointing' is also interesting here as it expresses a personal emotion held by the manager about the players and their performance rather than speaking evaluating the match events. He also refers to the player's performance as 'sluggish' in line 3, but downgrades this with the modifier 'a little bit'.

Moyes did draw on negative adjectives; however, these were mainly confined to assessments of the nature of the goals the team conceded. These included '*poor*', '*bad*' and '*disappointing*'. The strongest adjective used was '*dreadful*' (used once), but this was used to evaluate the goals the team gave away and were used in his last match in charge of Manchester United. Moyes also exhibited a tendency to foreground the positive aspects of the performance, as can be seen in Extract 6 below.

Extract 6

0:00.0 - 0:27.1

Interviewer

1. david a tough day in a force nine gale out there
2. what are your overall thoughts on the way the game panned out

David Moyes

3. well I don't think we could've been any more unlucky than we were
4. you know the first goal we lose an incredible deflection
5. we were the better side
6. and the second one was a (whirlidy) so we hold our hands up to that one
7. but I thought we played well
8. I thought we made numerous chances and chances to score and just didn't take them
9. and on a difficult day I thought we played quite well

When asked to provide an overall assessment of the match, Moyes refers the team's bad luck in the first goal in line 4 and the mistake they made in the second goal (line 6). However, he uses most of the turn to emphasise the positive aspects of the team's performance and play in the match. Structurally, in this extract and in other examples, Moyes places these positive assessments in the informationally more prominent position at the end of the turn which may have the effect of leaving audiences thinking that his overall assessment of the loss was a predominantly positive one.

(3) Invoking expectations of Manchester United

Another difference in the way the managers evaluated their own team's performance in losses related to the theme of expectation. Ferguson and Phelan seemed to explicitly construct and invoke the high degree of expectation surrounding the club when evaluating the team's performance after a loss. Extract 7 below is an example of this.

Extract 7

0:00.0 - 0:24.2

Interviewer

1. Sir Alex nobody would've expected that result
2. and it wasn't really a Manchester United performance for parts of the game

Sir Alex Ferguson

3. well I agree with you we didn't expect that
4. the pitch was heavy and didn't suit our play
5. the second half at least we did something about the game and at two two I thought we would go on and win it
6. but third goal was a killer for us you know it was a bad defensive error
7. we should've done better with that

In this extract we see Ferguson, following the interviewer's cue, evaluate the loss as counter to the expectations associated with his club. After agreeing with the interviewer in line three he revisits the theme of expectation again in line 7 by suggesting the team 'should've done better'. Later in the same interview he picks this theme up again ('we didn't expect that') and the nature of the decisive goal given away ('we don't expect to lose these kind of goals'). This expectation was also a feature of the talk of Phelan in evaluating losses, as Extract 8 illustrates.

Extract 8

0:16.1 - 0:47.7

Interviewer

1. I was going to say I couldn't really see too many excuses in there
2. Everton were exceptional today and probably deserved it

Michael Phelan

3. I think Everton deserved the victory yes
4. we didn't perform to the usual high standards that we expect
5. it was disappointing you know to get an early lead like we did and they give a goal away literally you know minutes afterwards
6. that's not what we expect
7. but in the overall picture of the game we didn't create enough
8. and we didn't do our jobs professionally enough to win the game

In this example, Phelan pays credit to the opposition (line 3), a team not challenging them for the title, but does so tentatively. He assesses the result, at least partially, as a failure by the players to meet the expected high standards of a Manchester United team (lines 4 and 6). This theme of expectation is again alluded to in line 8 where the manager claims the team did not perform professionally enough to win the game.

Engaging with the theme of 'expectation' was less prominent in Moyes' losing interview responses analysed here. There was one instance of this approach offered by Moyes in the data analysed here, which is illustrated below in Extract 9.

Extract 9

0:56.8 - 1:17.1

Interviewer

1. can you take solace in the attitude and for the way that you controlled periods towards the end of the game and of course the goal?

David Moyes

2. no I don't think we take any solace from it
3. but what we do know is it's there's a long way to go in this season
4. and we've just started
5. and the history of Manchester United and the players at this club bounce back and continue to do well
6. so that's the next bit

In the above example, Moyes implies that this loss is not as significant because it has come early in the season and there is plenty of time to make amends. He also provides, in line 5, an assessment of the quality of the players and the history of the club, which can potentially be read as an acknowledgement of the expectation. However, this is the only instance in this data of engagement with the expectation surrounding Manchester United, and it is framed more positively and indirectly as an assessment of the confidence he has in the club being able to bounce back. Ferguson and Phelan were more direct when drawing on the expectations of the club, and used these when negatively evaluating the team's shortcomings during a losing effort. Additionally, in none of the interviews analysed here did Moyes use the construction 'should've', a device that was often employed by his predecessors in losing interviews and one that explicitly constructs an unmet expectation.

(4) Bouncing back: making strong assertions of a response to the loss

Finally, in the post-match interview data analysed here, all three managers were regularly invited to evaluate the future response needed or expected from the team after a loss. This included questions asking for information about the plan following the loss, whether their goals and expectations will change as a result of the loss, whether the team is able to bounce back from the loss, and how the manager is going to address the issues going forward. The way that the three managers employed linguistic resources when addressing these future-oriented questions was perhaps the area where the most obvious differences emerged. In particular, differences emerged in relation to the use of modal verbs and choices of lexical verbs in the construction of verb phrases that describe the expected response from the team. Ferguson and Phelan, with the help of particular modal and lexical verbs, appeared to construct stronger statements regarding the team's response to the loss. Extracts 10 and 11 illustrate their typically assertive language choices (underlined).

Extract 10

1:40.1 - 1:55.7

Interviewer

1. and how do you recover from this
2. is there a set formula a plan of action or just see what happens

Sir Alex Ferguson

3. the impact will come from the embarrassment of it
4. there's a lot of boys in the dressing room today will be feeling that
5. and we'll expect an impact I have no doubt there'll be a response to

that

Extract 11

2:11.8 – 2:30.9

Interviewer

1. how important is it then to bounce back straight away and that means Wolves in the week

Michael Phelan

2. well that's the opportunity we've got now
3. you know and we're a team that will do that
4. we have a good squad of players we'll recover from this and the game
5. comes quickly so we haven't time to dwell on what's happened today
6. it's disappointing we're annoyed with ourselves but we'll move
7. forward

In Extract 10, line 5, Ferguson uses 'will' to express certainty of a response to the loss and modifies this certainty further through the upgrader 'no doubt'. In Extract 11, Phelan draws on similar strategies throughout his response, the strongest of which is line 3 when asserting that the team is a team that bounces back from bad results. This can be read simultaneously as a response to the question and an expression of confidence in both the team's ability and, implicitly, the managers' ability to turn things around. Expressions of certainty are also employed in lines 4 ('we'll recover') and lines 7 to 8 ('we'll move forward').

On the other hand, there was evidence David Moyes preferred less assertive constructions than his predecessors when addressing these future-oriented questions. Extract 12 is an example of Moyes' general approach to addressing questions regarding the future after a loss.

Extract 12

Interviewer

1. and it's your seventh defeat of the season you've got to really big game in midweek now and a Wembley final if you can turn around that deficit
2. you've got to do that

David Moyes

3. yeah we'll keep going
4. we showed a lot of good things today
5. you know we have to try and improve that's what we're doing
6. there's a progress that we have to make we have to improve all round
7. and myself and the club will try and do that

In this extract, the interviewer presents to David Moyes for confirmation a strong assessment that the team needs to turn around a bad run of results by winning the upcoming match. In responding, Moyes employs a range of strategies that are arguably less assertive than those employed in Extracts 10 and 11 above and less assertive, even, than those used by the interviewer in his question. In line 3, his response ('we'll keep going') does employ 'will' and he expresses the need to improve all round in strong terms in line 6 ('have to improve'). However, elsewhere, in lines 5 and 7 he uses the word 'try', which weakens somewhat his commitment to improving. Such a move may be an attempt

to protect the speaker from being held accountable for any commitment implied in a proposition or statement given about the club's future performances or results. There were a number of instances of this or similar resources being employed by Moyes in his interviews when addressing these questions regarding the future response from the team (as illustrated in extracts 13-16).

Extract 13

1. no all it means is we lost today's game and we'll try and win the next game
2. you can never think much further than that and that's what we'll try and do

Extract 14

1. I'm just going to try and keep winning the games
2. the teams above us are doing well
3. it looks as though we're a long way off it
4. we're well aware of that but we're going to try and keep fighting for it

Extract 15

1. very much so
2. and we'll go there well as i said we'll play them here next week and we'll do everything we possibly can to try and get a positive result

Extract 16

1. yeah i've said for a while you know it's we're underway with what we're doing
2. and we'll try and make sure that we get the right things in place for the start of next season and give ourselves a better chance of competing nearer the top end of the league

In the interviews collected and analysed here, Ferguson used the word 'try' once in reference to how the players 'always try their best', and Phelan used it once in reference to what the players were trying to achieve on the field (*'we attempted probably to get the second goal to try and push on a little bit more'*). Neither used it in reference to future responses of the team and management staff after a loss, preferring to rely on more assertive strategies when construing the response they expected. The use of 'try' by Moyes in his interviews was also identified by fans as problematic (Stone, 2014a).

Discussion

The above analysis illustrates that there were linguistic differences in the way David Moyes and his predecessors evaluated losses in post-match interviews. Moyes appeared more willing to compliment fierce rivals of Manchester United than his predecessors, used less negative lexis and with weaker illocutionary force when describing a result or his team's performance, appeared less willing to explicitly invoke the expectation surrounding the club, and modified the strength of verb phrases in ways that (perhaps inadvertently) reduced the commitment of propositions about the expected response from the team after the loss.

Several of these strategies were noted as being negatively received by fans of Manchester United (Jackson, 2014; Markham, 2014; Stone, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, if a tentative claim can be put forward that the differences identified in the contrastive analysis may have played their part in the formation of a negative impression of Moyes, how might we account for this? In other words, why would a manager who compliments rivals who have beaten his team, reduces negative assessments of his own team's performances, does not explicitly draw on or invoke the expectations surrounding his team when assessing their performances and reduces commitment to unknown future events be interpreted negatively.

In applying Bucholtz and Hall's (2005a) perspective on identity to these findings, we can put forward claims as to how these linguistic features might be contributing to the construction of the managerial identities of Moyes and his predecessors, and how these identities might be interpreted or evaluated within the social context he is speaking, in this case the context of a manager or head representative of Manchester United football club – a global and highly successful professional football club.

Managing Manchester United: hegemonic position and the importance of strong and dominant identity performances in the media

One account is that the actions of Moyes in his post-match interviews potentially threatened the values of strength and dominance associated with Manchester United and their hegemonic position in English football. As highlighted in the case study background, Manchester United was one of the most successful clubs in Europe at the time of Moyes' appointment as manager. Under the management of Sir Alex Ferguson, in the previous twenty-one years, Manchester United had won the Premier League thirteen times and they were also the most recent champions in the season immediately prior to Moyes' appointment as manager. All of this can be seen to contribute to what Inoue (2004) refers to as a "historical narrative", one that in this context construes Manchester United as a strong and dominant team within the social structure of English (and European) football (Andrews, 2004).

Moyes' interview strategies may have been seen by fans to conflict with this historical narrative of strength and dominance. While, from one perspective, his strategies could be seen to construct a (1) magnanimous (by complimenting opposition teams who have beaten his team even if they are fierce rivals), (2) tolerant (by choosing to not to be too heavily critical of his team or to invoke the expectation surrounding them), and (3) cautious (by choosing not to make claims about the future that he could be potentially held accountable for) managerial identity, when interpreted in the contextual frame of Manchester United, these stances may have been reshaped by fans in more pejorative ways. For example, a complimentary stance towards fierce rivals could instead may be re-evaluated by fans as an indirect acceptance that other teams are better or on the same level as their team and therefore a challenge to the team's hegemonic position in English football. What might be considered a more tolerant stance towards the team's losing performances by some may have indexed, for fans in this context, a manager not strong enough to attribute blame to players or assert himself on his changing room. And, caution shown by the manager may have instead indexed a lack of confidence in his own ability to help the club bounce back and reassert itself as a dominant team after a loss.

These meanings of strength and dominance are also likely to have been invoked in the interpretive processes of fans as they engaged in a wider comparison of Moyes as different from his

predecessors. For Bucholtz and Hall (2005), the identities of speakers acquire meaning in relation to other social identity positions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 598) and one way this is achieved is along lines of sameness and difference. Perceptions of sameness or difference emerge in social interaction as people draw on a person's linguistic behaviour but also other important symbolic or semiotic resources in a given context. In professional sport, obtaining wins is considered a manager's job making match results an important semiotic resource through which a manager is evaluated. In this particular case, the differing degrees of success on the field may have contributed directly to fan perceptions of Moyes as different and, by extension, less able than his predecessors. Moyes' interview style may have also been drawn on as data for fans in this comparative process. The analysis conducted here suggests there were differences and these differences may have been marked for Manchester United fans when compared with the 'reference group' (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005b, p. 383) of Ferguson and Phelan. The stronger, more assertive style of his predecessors may have become stereotypically associated with the success and hegemonic position of the club, while, in contrast, the differences exhibited in Moyes interview style in conjunction with his losses may have attracted the status of non-normative.

Finally, it should be noted here that stances of strength and dominance may also be stereotypically associated with and generally valued within the wider context of male professional sport. Hierarchy and the positioning of people or entities at the top of hierarchies is an action associated with masculinity (Kiesling, 2001, p. 252) and dominant, socially approved constructions of men (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 28). Therefore, these values may be drawn on by some fans when interpreting the identity performances of Moyes. However, further research would be needed to explore the generality of this claim further.

In summary, then, we could argue that the source of frustration was not with Moyes' strategies for evaluating a loss but rather with what these strategies signalled in this context. It is possible that there was a perceived divergence (in the eyes of fans) between the hegemonic position associated with Manchester United and its managers of the past and the identity being constructed by Moyes, as the person most recently entrusted to manage the club's continued dominance of English football. We could extend this claim to include managers of dominant clubs, who may be expected to construct themselves in strong, authoritative and confident ways in order to play the part and index for fans an ability to handle a post with high expectations. Any behaviour that potentially threatens or undermines the dominant position of a group of people within the social order in which they belong will be subject to censure. This interpretation process may be brought to bear on managers who, in particular, are unable to emulate the success the fans of their club demand.

Broader implications: employing fine-grained analysis and linguistic theories of identity to unpack impression management issues.

Beyond the domain specific theorising done above, some broader implications regarding impression management can be drawn that this fine-grained analysis has highlighted. Firstly, as with other pragmatics researchers (Gordon, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus, 2005; Simon-Vandenberg, 1996), this study has shown how contextually dependent impression formation is and how language choices can play a crucial role in the management of one's impression, especially in media contexts where specific social or professional identities are on show and readily available for scrutiny. This points to the value of a context-specific examination of impression management issues and the need for impression management and interpersonal communication research to continue to account for context, as opposed to identifying 'potential skill commonalities among ostensibly different social

interaction contexts' (Berger, 2005, p. 434). Therefore, pragmatics researchers, through their close analyses of language use in situ, have an important part to play in the theoretical development of this interdisciplinary area of research.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of role in accounting for impression management issues. Previous research into discursive action in sports media interviews has highlighted values such as modesty, neutrality and team-orientedness as being important to professional team sports *players* when speaking in post-match media interviews (see File, 2015). While these values may also be important for *managers*, additional values of strength, confidence and dominance may be equally or even more pertinent in managerial post-match interviews. This suggests that role may be a significant point of departure through which impressions are formed, even when speakers are interacting in the same genre (in this case the post-match interview). Returning to the importance of context, however, these values of strength, confidence and dominance may be more pertinent to managers who find themselves managing historically dominant and highly successful clubs, like Manchester United, who have an impression to protect as a dominant team within the meritocratic structure that is professional sport.

However, more broadly, this study has illustrated the value in exploring impression management issues through the lens of a linguistically informed approach to identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a), due to its ability to capture complex interrelationships between linguistic action, social meaning and identity construction (and identity interpretation) that can be relevant in the formation of an impression. Getting to the root of why a person is or was unable to construct a positive impression is a complex endeavour. As has been illustrated here, this process can implicate meaning-making in relation to identity construction and negotiation, whereby being positively perceived by audiences, interlocutors or members of the relevant community is influenced by a person's ability to construct, through linguistic action, a range of social meanings that have come to be associated with their wider identity category. In this regard, impression management can be seen as identity management, whereby speakers attempt to (strategically) achieve 'social identity alignment' (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003, p. 360) with regards to the appropriate presentation (and interpretation) of self in (professional) interaction. The notion of appropriateness, though, is contextually dependent and requires unpacking in a given context. This unpacking process can be supported by using a range of pragmatic and discourse analytical tools and a theoretical lens on social identity construction.

Several principles inherent to a linguistic theory of identity construction in interaction have proven relevant to unpacking the impression management issue at hand. Beyond identifying role as a pertinent contextual variable in approaching impression management as a topic for investigation, I have also argued for the relevance of sociohistorical modelling of identities (Inoue, 2004) and the potential impact these can play in evaluating the performances of speakers. This principle is an important component of linguistic theories of social identity, as it is through the accretion of stances that abstract social identities can come into being and are able to be discussed (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a; Ochs, 1993). Historical precedents may prove particularly powerful when they are deemed to have been successful, as appears to be the case with Moyes' predecessors. Associations from these successful precedents can be employed by impression formers to construct identities based on similarity and difference, whereby difference, as was the case here, can be seen as problematic.

The importance of identity as a co-constructed social phenomenon also has implications for understanding impression management and impression formation, as these are meaning-making processes that are also co-constructed. Moyes almost certainly did not aim to present himself as un-Manchester-United-like through the linguistic choices he made; rather, this subject position was constructed for him by fans who may have been drawing on their own identities as members of the

community Moyes was representing. Such an idea shifts or at least invites a refocusing of impression management issues from the individual to the context in which a speaker is operating. In this regard, speakers aiming to garner a positive impression may need to see themselves as not strictly free agents, but rather as confined by the normative pressures of a given community (Coates, 2016, p. 143), and when they are seen by interlocutors or audiences to challenge or, in this case, subvert said norms then this can prove problematic for the achievement of a positive impression.

In conclusion, this study has shown the value of employing a linguistic lens on identity as a relevant tool for unpacking issues related to impression management and impression formation. Meaning, particularly meaning about identities is constructed and evaluated in the everyday professional and personal discursive activity of individuals, and these constructions and evaluations are subject to expectations regarding the way actors adopting certain social roles should talk (Kiesling, 2006, p. 265). Detailed, contextually situated analyses of the linguistic action of speakers in socially defined (professional) roles can help to elucidate connections between language use, social context and impression formation.

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